ABSTRACT

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANDRE GIDE'S OEDIPE AND OLA ROTIMI'S THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

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Thesis dated December, 2000

Although there have been numerous and varied treatments of Oedipus throughout the ages, there is to date no detailed analytical study of myth based on André Gide's Oedipe and Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not to Blame. This study is a critical analysis of these two dramatic texts, which have been reworked from fifth century Greek tragedy. The principal aim is to compare these two plays taken from different cultures, in an effort to show that they both have a common origin--Sophocles' Oedipus the King. Through this comparison, the author wishes to show that each playwright presents Oedipus as a classic, which transcends cultural boundaries, thus making Sophocles' drama a classic work in world literature.

The study is presented in four chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction, which deals with the origin of the Oedipus theme and some of the major

writers who helped to popularize it. This chapter will also present references, theses and other critical works written on the plays in question.

The second and third chapters deal with the plays of each playwright: Oedipe by André Gide and The Gods Are Not to Blame by Ola Rotimi. Each chapter will include a brief sketch of the author's life, a resume of the plays, and the development of major and minor characters. The fourth chapter will deal with the similarities and the contrasts in the plays and will also serve as the conclusion.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANDRE GIDE'S OEDIPE AND OLA ROTIMI'S THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If the writer has succeeded in her attempt to accomplish the proposed aims of this thesis, its success is due mainly to the constant, tireless, and unselfish guidance and assistance of her major professor, Dr. Earle D. Clowney. She wishes to express her eternal gratitude to her husband, parents and friends whose moral support has been unceasing.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the fifth century, the Greek Philosopher, Sophocles, wrote Oedipus The King, a play and a myth, which originated from folktale. Martin Nilsson states, "In view of the fact that it is one of few characteristic Märchen names in Greek mythology, I am persuaded that the origin of Oedipus is to be found not in history but in folk-tales."[1] There is a dispute about the exact date of the play. The argument shows that there is a possible relationship between the plague described in the play and an actual plague in Athens in 430-427 B.C. It is not known what other tragedies were presented in the same contest, but an ancient commentator says Oedipus was awarded second place. The prize was not an indication of the play's merits, for Aristotle, in his Poetics, praised it as the perfect model of Greek tragedy: "Of all forms of recognition, however, the best is that which springs from the events themselves, the shock of surprise having thus a probable basis. Such are the recognitions in the Oedipus of Sophocles and in Iphigeneia."[2] According to present knowledge, the story of Oedipus and his family is more dramatized than any other legend. More than thirteen Greek dramatists wrote plays on the subject, there have been many translations into different languages and adaptations of the play. Even some religious and psychological theories have gotten their roots from the legend. Many writers have compared the play to the book of Job in the Bible where the blood of

man cried for vengeance. Others like J. G. Frazer, in his Folklore in the Old Testament, compared Oedipus with Moses who, in order to be saved, was also accidentally picked up as a child and raised in a palace as a prince and as Moses delivered the Israelites from suffering, so did Oedipus deliver Thebans from the Sphinx. One example of the psychological theories is Sigmund Freud's The Oedipus Complex in which he talked about children's love for one parent and hatred for the other. He explains that his theory is confirmed by the Oedipus legend, and in his The Interpretation of Dreams, he writes,

> Today, just as then, many men dream of having sexual relations with their mothers, and speak of the fact with indignation and astonishment. It is clearly the key to the tragedy and the complement to the dream of the dreamer's father being dead. The story of Oedipus is the reaction of the imagination to these two typical dreams. And just as these dreams, when dreamt by adults, are accompanied by feelings of repulsion, so too the legend must include horror and self-punishment.[3]

Among the authors that helped popularize the legend are André Gide and Ola Rotimi. Their plays, Oedipe and The Gods Are Not to Blame, will be discussed, analyzed and compared, but before that, there will be a brief look at the life of Sophocles and the summary of the play.

Sophocles was born in Colonus, a part of Athens, about 495 B. C. during the period characterized by the dissolution of tyranny and the ascendancy of Greece over the Persian Empire. It was also during his youth that the Golden Age of Athens was inaugurated and promoted by the statesman Pericles. Sophocles died in 406 B. C. after witnessing the approach and inevitable collapse of Athens under the strain of the Peloponnesian War. During that time, Greek dramas were awarded first, second, and third prizes and out of the 120 plays that he probably wrote, twenty-four won first prizes, a record unequalled by any known Greek dramatist. He won his first dramatic victory

(over Aeschylus) in 468 B. C. The Athenians were so enthusiastic about his plays and they therefore elected him as one of their generals--the highest elective office in Athens. He was quite unconcerned with practical politics but he did take an active part in the community's religious life, holding priesthoods in several cults. Unlike Euripides, who withdrew to a cave on the Island of Salamis to write his tragedies, Sophocles was famous for his sociability. A Byzantine anthologist chose, as representative of his works, seven plays and only these seven have survived.

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

When Laius, the King of Thebes, and his wife Jocasta have a son, the oracle of Delphi warns Laius that his son is destined to murder his own father and marry his own mother. King Laius then pierces the child's ankles with brooches and gives him to a herdsman to expose him on Mount Cithaeron. However, the horseman of Polybus, King of Corinth, finds the child and brings him to the queen wife who adopts him. Then she, having healed his ankles, calls him Oedipus, because of his swollen feet.

As Oedipus comes to manhood in the court of Polybus, he proves to be a courageous young man. One day he goes to the Oracle to inquire about his future. The Oracle tells him how he is destined to murder his father and marry his mother. He is also warned to stay where he is, but believing himself to be Polybus' son and out of fear of killing him, he leaves his home town hoping never to come back until the death of both parents. Now it happens that when Oedipus is driving his chariot, he meets King Laius on a certain narrow road. When they meet, the king's herald orders Oedipus to give way.

As Oedipus delays, the herald kills one of his horses. This enrages Oedipus who slays the herald and also kills Laius in a battle.

After the death of Laius, Creon, the brother of Jocasta becomes the regent in Thebes. It is during this time that a new and heavy calamity befalls Thebes: the Sphinx comes to the land. This beast, with the face of a woman, the breast, feet and tail of a lion and the wings of a bird, is laying waste the Theban fields and has declared that it will not depart unless someone interprets the riddle which she gives. She has learned the riddle from the muses and sits on Mount Phicium propounding it to anyone among the Thebans willing to try to solve it. So the contest she proposes to Creon is that she will leave the country if anyone interprets her riddle, but that she will destroy whoever fails to give the correct answer. This is the riddle: "What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?"

In order to face the critical situation, Creon makes a proclamation throughout Greece, promising that he will give the kingdom of Thebes and his sister Jocasta in marriage to the person solving the riddle of the Sphinx. Many come and are destroyed by the Sphinx, who devours them one by one.

When many have perished in that manner, Oedipus, who has heard the proclamation, comes and declares that he has found the solution to the riddle. On meeting with the Sphinx, he asserts that the riddle referred to man, because as a little child he is four-footed, going on his arms and legs, as an adult he is two-footed, and as an old man he gets a third limb in a staff. On hearing the solution, the Sphinx keeps her promise and, throwing herself down from the citadel, destroys herself.

So, having fulfilled the first part of the Oracle's prophecy by killing his father, Oedipus is about to fulfill the second part. He succeeds to the kingdom and, not knowing who she is, marries his own mother Jocasta, who besides gives him children: Polynice, Eteocle, Ismene and Antigone, his own offspring and yet his brothers and sisters.

Because of this unusual family situation, barrenness of crops and hunger fall on Thebes, and as if it were not enough, a plague, which an oracle attributes to blood-guiltiness related to the death of Laius, threatens the city. The Theban seer Tiresias is then questioned as to how to deliver Thebes from the plague, and he replies that Laius' death has to be avenged.

Oedipus, being the king, then vows to find and punish the murderer. Despite the dissuasions from Jocasta, his wife, and Creon, his brother-in-law, who are of the opinion that whoever killed Laius has made it possible for Oedipus to take the throne, the king insists on investigating the death of Laius. As he makes his inquiries, he finds out that he, himself, is the murderer and that this same dead king was his father, which also means that Jocasta is not just his wife and the mother of his children, she is his mother. At this discovery, Jocasta kills herself and Oedipus blinds himself and is banished from the country, led away from the city by his daughter, Antigone.

Since André Gide kept the original Sophoclean story, except for minor spelling changes in names, because of French accent marks, and in the case of Jocasta to Jocaste, the summary of the play will not be repeated in the next chapter.

NOTES

[1] Martin P. Nilsson, The Mycenaen Origin of Greek Mythology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), 102.

[2] Aristotle, The Poetics, translated by James Hutton in Oedipus Tyrannus, A New Translation Passages from Ancient Authors, Religion and Psychology: Some Studies Criticism by Luci Berkowitz (New York : W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), 82.

[3] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1955), 243.

CHAPTER II

ANDRE GIDE'S OEDIPE

André Gide's works are inseparable from his life as he continually made himself the subject of his works. Albert Thilbaudet, in 1929, said to him: "Vous êtes partout dans votre œuvre, vous êtes dans tous vos personnages, même lorsque vous vous en croyez absent, vous avez créé un monde à votre image."[1] Stories about him are often contradictory in what they seem to reveal of the man and his life, like his works, embraced ambiguities. Gide has appealed to different audiences: a traditional psychological novelist to some, an innovative modernist to others; he was a major literary critic, social crusader, and spokesman for homosexual rights. His works disturbed generations of Frenchmen as he set his readers thinking and reexamining themselves. The dramatist was greatly influenced by Goethe, Nietzche, Blake, and Dostoevsky and this increased his versatility. Gide was deeply religious owing to his upbringing, then attracted by unbelief, even by communism, and his treatment of grave moral issues broadened French literature for throughout his career he used his writings to examine moral questions. He believed in the disassociation of love and pleasure, carnal passion, and respect, and viewed homosexuality as a legitimate attachment. Gide also wrote on the struggle between an ordinary life and a rigid and lofty conception of religion, the opposition of the claims of society and the expansion of the individual, and on duties to

others and duties to oneself. He is as well known for his influence as a moralist and as a thinker as for his contributions to literature. Gide was constantly obsessed with how to be sincere, especially as the profession of a writer requires the assumption of masks, striving to please or to strike, and adorning or reviling oneself. "He sought to be sincere, but at the same time sought to please by his sincerity, which inevitably became suspect."[2]

André-Paul-Guillaume Gide was born on November 22, 1869, into a large protestant family of the bourgeoisie class in Paris. His father, a professor in the law faculty at the University of Paris, was Langue-docien, while his mother was from Normandy. As an only child, Gide lost his father in 1880 and was brought up by a very pious, strict, and austere mother and he therefore considered himself different from other children. G. W. Ireland underscores these feelings when he states:

> Le 28 octobre, brutalement emporté par une tuberculose intestinale, Paul Gide meurt et André, perdant ce père doux et un peu effacé dans son foyer, pour qui il avait éprouvé une vénération un peu craintive, se retrouve seul avec sa mère, femme fort intelligente, cultivée, ouverte à la pensée vivante et libre, mais d'un rigorisme religieux, moral et puritain qui marquera profondément l'enfance de son fils.[3]

Gide's childhood was considered difficult, not only because of the early loss of his father, but owing to the fact that even when Paul Gide was alive, there was constant tension in the house. The behavioral differences in both parents (brought about by their faith, upbringing and Paul's devotion to his job) caused a lack of communication and harmony in their household. The over friendly attitude of Paul Gide and Anna Shackleton was vehemently opposed by Madame Gide who could not even share laughter with her husband and her governess. Recounting this opposition, Ireland observes:

> That Gide was a difficult child is generally conceded. It would perhaps be fairer to say, or at least to add, that he had a very difficult childhood. The stream of admonitions which his mother, with unflagging zeal, directed at her son may have represented for her a satisfactory discharge of what her conscience told her were her obligations. As an expression of the loving sympathy which the child so badly needed they were, to say the least, disastrously inadequate. The sense they gave the child of being constantly scrutinized in all his actions, constantly judged and almost invariably disapproved of, added immensely to the sense of insecurity which was built up in him by, among other things, his parents' difficulty in giving a suitable expression to the love that they undoubtedly felt for him or even to their affection for each other. In the Hell that represented for a sensitive child a home and family life securely founded on all that was virtuous and respectable the young Gide struggled painfully towards manhood. Two courses were open to him if he was to survive as a personality at all: rebellion and flight. As a child the only form of rebellion open to him was protest. Hence the innumerable 'scenes' that were so painful a recollection for all that knew him. Since material flight was out of the question it is to dissimulation that he turned, to unreal imaginings and to various forms of 'magic.'[4] 'Of which, of course, the most obvious form was masturbation. It will be remembered that Boris in Les Faux-Monnayeurs actually refers to this practice as 'magic.'[5]

In this perspective it becomes possible to understand why Gide placed on the first page of his memoirs the famous declaration: "À cet âge innocent où l'on voudrait que toute l'âme ne soit que transparence, tendresse et pureté, je ne revois en moi qu'ombre, laideur, sournoiserie."[6] He described his secret activities:

> Je revois aussi une assez grande table, celle de la salle à manger sans doute, recouverte d'un tapis bas tombant; au-dessous de quoi je me glissais avec le fils de la concierge, un bambin de mon âge qui venait parfois me retrouver.
>
> - Qu'est-ce que vous fabriquez là-dessous? criait ma bonne.
> - Rien. Nous jouons.
>
> Et l'on agitait bruyamment quelques jouets qu'on avait emportés pour la frime. En vérité nous nous amusions autrement: l'un près de l'autre, mais, non l'un avec l'autre pourtant, nous avions ce que j'ai su plus tard qu'on appelait de mauvaises habitudes.[7]

> 'Le plaisir,' clandestine and 'sournois,' is a refuge, a consolation, and already, perhaps unconsciously yet still potentially, a form of revolt. These solitary practices constitute by no means the only form of flight or protest that mark the boy's reaction to the emotional difficulties of his childhood; but they were the occasion of the first major crisis in his early education.[8]

> At the same time, he was also awakening to the mysteries of sex. As he had been taught, or at least allowed, to let things take their course, he offered no resistance to his desires and cravings. He was fully prepared to give in to them, provided they made no real demands on him and were intense and exciting – like a game. There were two possibilities: either the game could be a solitary one – he took to masturbation with alacrity – or it could be played with partners, inevitably children.[9]

Although his relationship with his father was short-lived, he had a positive memory of him and their relationship:

> Accaparé par la préparation de son cours à la Faculté de Droit, mon père ne s'occupait guère de moi. Il passait la plus grande partie du jour, enfermé dans un vaste cabinet de travail un peu sombre, où je n'avais accès que lorsqu'il m'invitait à y venir. C'est d'après une photographie que je revois mon père, avec une barbe carrée, des cheveux noirs assez longs et bouclés; sans cette image je n'aurais gardé souvenir que de son extrême douceur. Ma mère m'a dit plus tard que ses collègues l'avaient surnommé Vir probus; et j'ai su par l'un d'eux que souvent on recourait à son conseil. Je ressentais pour mon père une vénération un peu craintive, qu'aggravait la solennité de ce lieu. J'y entrais comme dans un temple; dans la pénombre se dressait le tabernacle de la bibliothèque; un épais tapis aux tons riches et sombres étouffait le bruit de mes pas. Il y avait un lutrin près d'une des deux fenêtres; au milieu de la pièce, une énorme table couverte de livres et de papiers. Mon père allait chercher un gros livre, quelque Coutume de Bourgogne ou de Normandie, pesant in-folio qu'il ouvrait sur le bras d'un fauteuil pour épier avec moi, de feuille en feuille, jusqu'où persévérait le travail d'un insecte rongeur. Le juriste, en consultant un vieux texte, avait admiré ces petites galeries clandestines et s'était dit: 'Tiens! cela amusera mon enfant'.[10]

The death of Paul Gide caused the wife to take up the role of both parents to the young Gide and, therefore, she became a very important part and the only authority in his life. It is strongly believed that this relationship gave rise to the ambivalence in Gide's character. She became overly protective of her only child and tried to instill every virtue in him, but in such a strict manner that he asked permission to do everything. He was not able to assert himself because, to Madame Gide, it was morally wrong, and none of his decisions was approved. She even chose his clothes and his style of dressing to suit

her. These led to an indecisive child and later an indecisive man who resented his mother--a resentment highlighted by Jean Delay when he states:

> One example of Gide's lasting resentment of his mother was his attitude toward the 'ridiculous' way she dressed him as a child. One day, in his old age, I complimented him on a suit he was wearing: 'Ah' he answered in a somewhat joking manner, 'I really think I shall never get over the pleasure I take in dressing my own way, wearing gay materials, soft, colored shirts, yes soft shirts!' Then his tone suddenly changed and became waspish: 'It was my way of protesting against what my mother made me wear as a child: the navy-blue uniform and the stiff collar almost choked me. Ah! Those stiff collars and especially the starched shirts, what torture! But it did me no good to kick, she forced me to wear that iron collar!' Those words in the mouth of a man of his age were surprising; but what surprised me even more was his tone of voice. I could feel the explosion of irritation, the return of a flame of animosity, which, after a lifetime, had not yet been extinguished.[11]

A letter written to his cousin Jeanne Rondeaux shows how exasperated he was by his mother's attitude:

> What's wrong with mamma? Since I've been here, I have received daily, letters and a shower of telegrams . . . I announce that the doctors are sending me to Champel--1st telegram: 'Champel strange why not the mountains?' I write that I'm taking showers-answer: 'Showers have always been bad for you.' Having arrived here in blue, I find my relatives in deep mourning for grand-mamma-disgrace--I'm forced to order something black to wear. I inform mamma of the fact and three days later receive-both the suits and a telegram from La Roque: 'Mourning almost over; not black, gray.' Finally, and it's the only thing important to me: I arrive here indisposed; I have serious doubts as to whether I can go back to Normandy without being most impudent-I try to make mamma understand that perhaps the doctors will keep me here; at that point the daily message read: 'You must absolutely come back; return indispensable.' Now that I am allowed to return-having wanted to so much, actually living for it-and the doctors don't think it imprudent, for I'm much better, -I write that I'm coming – and that I'm happy. What do I receive: 'Dear, dear, dear child, I understand you-no, don't come back-you had better . . .' Gradually the formula becomes: 'Above all, don't come back.' One last thing: since I have been advised to try winter in the mountains (which mamma wanted so much for me), mamma wants me to go to the Balearic Islands!!! And when I have the misfortune to say one word, mamma at once writes me the same as she says about Edouard and Georges: 'One can feel the foreign influence!' (In this case it is my Aunt Charles, as you can well imagine.) Or else: 'My poor child, how nervous you were when you wrote

> me your last letter!' Then I decided to send only telegrams for six days, one each morning; each and every one says: 'I'm coming back end of the month; beg you to change nothing about the reunion . . .' Nothing has been interfered with, has it, my dear sister, and we shall soon be together again, just as if we had parted only to sleep.[12]

Jean Delay describes this mother-son relationship:

> The important thing is that the role of authority in the family unit, usually played by the father, and its assimilation in the child's imagination with the God of severity, was, in the case of André Gide, played by the mother. He was divided between love for her solicitude and hate for her tyranny, desire for her vigilance and fear of her supervision, admiration for her virtue and resentment of her coldness. He revered her as an austere saint and hated her as a severe master. Overwhelmed by moral attentions and deprived of physical tenderness, he was caught between sentiment and resentment. The current that drew him toward her and the countercurrent that pushed him from her tossed him about between the ebb and the flow of contrary impulses, in such a way that he always resisted her authority with a heavy heart and gave into it begrudgingly. His attempts to protest never lasted very long against the omnipotent despot who demanded obedience without discussion and intended to make all her son's choices for him, leaving him neither freedom nor latitude. She was not only fighting his taste for pleasure but any attempt at personal affirmation, or what is more or less accurately called instinct of self-assertion. That puritanical woman, imbued with the doctrine of self-hate, could not bear any manifestation of vanity, complacency, or even pride in her son, and she did her best to sweep out everything that in my own eyes could inflate my self-importance.[13]

Gide himself wrote: "She had a way of loving me that sometimes made me hate her, but also, I admired the way her life had been one continual effort to draw a little nearer to everything that was worthy of being loved."[14] He also spoke in memorable terms of his "admiration for that heart which never allowed anything vile to enter it, beat only for others, and incessantly gave itself up to duty."[15] After he suffered from a serious nervous breakdown, she never let him out of her sight until age twenty-one. This gave him a codependent character, especially among his friends. Of his friendships, indecision and dependency, he writes:

> And when I chat with a friend, I almost always spend my time telling him what he thinks, and I myself think the same, being concerned only with establishing and measuring the relations between him and things. But when I am with two friends who are of different opinions, I remain on edge between them, no longer knowing what to say, not daring to take side with one or the other; accepting every affirmative, rejecting every negation.[16]

When Gide was eight he was sent to the École Alsacienne in Paris, but his education was much interrupted by neurotic bouts of ill health (headaches and nervous breakdown). Often kept at home, he was taught by indifferent tutors and by his mother's governess. During his adolescent years, he spent a lot of time with his teacher Monsieur Richard, who taught him, as he could no longer go back to school because of his sickness. Through him, André learned to read and critique authors. He also learned to play piano and this made him a great reader and pianist all his life. He was happy under the tutelage of M. Richard although he had some misgivings, and of him Gide writes: "M. Richard had a taste for letters, but was not sufficiently cultivated for his taste to be really good."[17] Because of this relationship, Gide became rapt in lyrical amazement, thus at age thirteen, he criticized Victor Hugo and openly showed disrespect for him. A few days after Hugo's funeral in June 1885, he wrote his cousin Jeanne Rondeaux:

> Last Thursday, we passed in front of the Pantheon with mamma and believe it or not Victor Hugo's wreaths were still outside on the steps, getting fresh air; those made of pearls are still in good condition, but those made of everlasting flowers are lying all over the steps like stewed fruit. We went in and everyone kept his hat on; the altar and the apse were gone, there was nothing but walls, therefore it seemed so big! No one stands on ceremony at all anymore; every one talks and laughs as if he were at home. Children play hide-and-seek behind the columns outside and amuse themselves by jumping over Victor Hugo's wreaths.[18]

While Gide was being initiated into literature, at least into the most romantic kind, he was also making progress with his music. And the poetic and musical emotions,

generously meted out by M. Richard and old Schifmaker, his piano teacher, made their way so rapidly in André Gide's very precious soul that on the morning of January 1, 1884, he had the revelation that he would be a poet. The anecdote is charming. He had been to Anna Shackleton's, his mother's governess, to wish her a happy New Year. As he was leaving, at about noon, beaming with joy, he saw a bird alight on his cap like the Holy Ghost. He immediately felt the thrilling assurance of having been marked out by a bird sent from heaven, and delighted and uplifted, ran home to his mother with the Heavenly creature in hand. "The moment of mad pride, brought about by the canary dropping from Heaven onto his head like a tongue of fire announcing his alliance with the beyond, was strengthened by a feeling of being predestined."[19] Of this feeling, Delay quotes Gide as indicating:

> I was already more than inclined to think I had a vocation of a mystical nature; henceforth I felt, I was bound by a kind of secret pact, and when I heard my mother making plans for my future, wishing, for instance, that I might enter the Forestry Department, which she thought particularly suited to my tastes, I would acquiesce half-heartedly for politeness' sake, as one lends oneself to a game, but knowing all the while that the vital interest lies elsewhere.[20]

> It would not have taken much for me to say to my mother: 'How could I dispose of myself? Don't you know that I haven't the right to? Haven't you understood that I am one of the elect?' In fact, I think that one day, when she was urging me to choose a profession, I did say something of the kind.[21]

While writing Paludes in La Brévine, he wrote to his mother:

> I can't really understand what you tell me about careers when you compare mine to that of doctors and engineers; I'm afraid that you are seriously mistaken . . . *Is not every artist necessarily an exception to all the rules?* a unique case and one that will never be found again? --or a nonvalue, if someone like him existed already. For you must understand that the great works remain and are not like doctors' operations, which must be repeated with every patient. The other professions, whatever they may be, present one permanent subject to the worker --

> this one, not at all; one works on oneself. Hence the strangely special importance of an artist's life.[22]

In 1891, a school friend and writer Pierre Louÿs, introduced him into the poet Stéphane Mallarmé's famous "Tuesday evenings," which were the center of the French Symbolist movement, and for a time Gide was influenced by the Symbolist aesthetic theories. His works Le Traité du Narcisse (1891), Le Voyage d'Urien (1893), and La Tentative amoureuse (1893) belong to this period. Marc Beigbeder describes this period in this way:

> On coming of age, Gide acquired a certain amount of money. He never became attached to money for its own sake, but it always ensured his independence. With his school days at an end, he came under the influence of Pierre Louÿs (a Protestant only in name), who introduced Gide to the Parisian literary avant-garde. Among the writers he met was Mallarmé, and the effects of this encounter were far-reaching for Gide. Gide felt reassured and justified when he found that Mallarmé shared his own estheticism and concern for verbal music. Gide's problems of soul and style were resolved–provisionally at least–by Mallarmé and his mystic devotion to the word.[23]

In 1893, Gide paid his first visit to North Africa, hoping to find release there from his dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed by his puritanically strict protestant upbringing. Gide's contact with the Arab world and its radically different moral standards helped to liberate him from the Victorian social and sexual conventions by which he felt stifled. One result of this nascent intellectual revolt against social hypocrisy was his growing awareness of his own homosexual inclinations. The lyrical prose poem, Les Nourritures terrestres (1897), reflects Gide's personal liberation from the fear of sin and his acceptance of the need to follow his own impulses, however unconventional they may be. But after he returned to France, Gide's relief at having shed the shackles of convention evaporated in what he called the stifling atmosphere of the

Paris salons. He described his surroundings in Paludes (1894), a brilliant story of animals who, living always in dark caves, lose their sight because they never use it. In 1894, Gide returned to North Africa, where he met Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, who encouraged him to admit the nature of his suppressed homosexuality. He was recalled to France because of his mother's illness; she later died in May 1895. Of this period, Claude Martin writes:

> C'est au cours d'un voyage en Algérie, en 1893, que Gide se 'découvre.' Exalté par l'univers des Mille et Une Nuits, le désert et les oasis, il en revient profondément transformé, ayant pris conscience de son homosexualité qu'il revendique bientôt. Cela ne l'empêche pas d'épouser Madeleine, sa cousine, en un mariage d'affection et de convenance. Cette situation inconfortable est au centre de l'oeuvre: Les Nourritures terrestres (1897), La Porte étroite (1909), Les Caves du Vatican (1914) font de Gide un auteur renommé.[24]

> In If It Die he relates the famous episode with Ali in the sand hills and the rapture it brought him. Once released, this rapture burst forth in laughter and high spirits, as might have been expected. But, from his silence on his return, it was clear that he had not finished with it: later he would have to tell and justify everything. This became one of the aims of an increasingly large part of his work; work that from now on would be indistinguishable from his life. The need for self-justification became all the more acute and embarrassing (not to say enriching) when, with the rashness of youth, he complicated his problem by marrying his pure minded cousin Madeleine, known as 'Em.' Almost all his work, as he said himself, was to be a long attempt to come to terms with an essential contradiction, a tenacious and unremitting dialogue between the levity that was part of his nature and the serious mindedness – also part of it – that was entirely characteristic of Em.[25]

As an adolescent, Gide was a practicing believer of a scrupulous and disturbing faith. He was passionately in love with his cousin Madeleine Rondeaux, whom he later married in 1895, the same year that his mother died. He formed a deep attachment to her while in Rouen after he discovered her anguish over her mother's behavior, an anguish suggested by Durosay when he states:

> C'est fin décembre 1882 que se situe le Schaudern de la rue de Lecat, Gide ayant la révélation, par hasard, à la fois de l'inconduite de sa tante Mathilde et de la souffrance secrète de sa cousine Madeleine: c'est à cette époque qu'il prend peu à peu conscience de son amour pour celle-ci, l'aînée des six enfants de son oncle Emile Rondeaux (il a alors treize ans; elle, née le 7 février 1867, presque seize), et qu'il a toujours préférée à ses soeurs Jeanne et Valentine. La découverte du douloureux secret de Madeleine a exalté son sentiment.[26]

She had earlier refused him several times before, even after he wrote his first book, Les Cahiers d'André Walter (1891), in which he expressed his love for her, hoping that this would make her agree to their marriage, but in October of 1895, a few months after the death of Madame Gide, they were married.

> Gide tombe amoureux de Madeleine et dans son premier livre 'les Cahiers d'André Walter', qu'il publie à l'âge de vingt et un ans, il écrit une déclaration d'amour démontrant ce qui arrivera si Madeleine persiste dans son refus de l'épouser: le caractère du jeune écrivain devient fou et meurt d'une fièvre cérébrale.[27]

He did not talk much about her but the description of Alissa in his La Porte étroite is very similar to Madeleine's charm.

> Je ne puis décrire un visage; les traits m'échappent, et jusqu'à la couleur des yeux; je ne revois que l'expression presque triste déjà de son sourire et que la ligne de ses sourcils, si extraodinairement révélés au-dessus des yeux, écartés de l'oeil en grand cercle. Je n'ai vu les pareils nulle part . . . si pourtant: dans une statuette Florentine de l'époque de Dante; et je me figure volontiers que Béatrix enfant avait des sourcils très largement arqués comme ceux-là. Ils donnaient au regard, à tout l'être, une expression d'interrogation à la fois anxieuse et confiante, - oui, d'interrogation passionnée. Tout, en elle, n'était que question et qu'attente . . . .[28]

Early in 1896, a few months after his marriage, Gide was elected mayor of the commune of La Roque--at 27, the youngest mayor in France. He took his duties seriously, but managed to complete Les Nourritures terrestres. It was published in 1897 and fell completely flat, although after World War I it was to become Gide's most

popular and influential work. In the postwar generation, the work's call to each individual to express fully whatever is in him evoked an immediate response. L'Immoraliste (1902), La Porte étroite (1909), and La Symphonie pastorale (1919) reflect Gide's attempts to achieve harmony in his marriage, in their treatment of the problems of human relationships. They mark an important stage in his development: adapting his work's treatment and style to his concern with psychological problems. He used these books, two of which are in the prose form of a simple but deeply ironic tale, narrated in the first person, which reveals the inherent moral ambiguities of life by means of his seemingly innocuous reminiscences. During most of this period, Gide was suffering from deep anxiety and distress. Although his love for Madeleine had given his life what he called its mystic orientation, he found himself unable, in a close, permanent relationship, to reconcile this love with his need for freedom and for experience of every kind. Les Caves du Vatican (1914) marks the transition to the second phase of Gide's creative period. He called it not a tale but a *sotie,* by which he meant a satirical work whose foolish or mad characters are treated farcically within an unconventional narrative structure. This was the first of his works to be violently attacked for anticlericalism. Gide called his next work, Les Faux-Monnayeurs (1926), his only novel. He meant by this that in conception, range, and scope it was on a vaster scale than his tales or his *soties*. It is the most complex and intricately constructed of his works, dealing as it does with relatives and teachers of a group of schoolboys subject to corrupting influences both in and out of the classroom. Les Faux-Monnayeurs treats all of Gide's favorite themes in

a progression of discontinuous scenes and happenings that come close to approximating the texture of daily life itself.

In 1925, Gide set off for French Equatorial Africa. When he returned he published Voyage au Congo (1927), in which he criticized French colonial policies. The compassionate, objective concern for humanity that marks the final phase of Gide's life found expression in political activities at this time. He became the champion of society's victims and outcasts, demanding more humane conditions for criminals and equality for women. For a time, it seemed to him that he found faith in Communism. In 1936, he set out on a visit to the Soviet Union, but later expressed his disillusionment with the Soviet Union, in Retour de l'U.R.S.S. (1936) and Retouches à mon retour de l'U.R.S.S. (1937). In the early 1900s, Gide had already begun to be widely known as a literary critic, and in 1908, he was foremost among those who founded La Nouvelle Revue Française, the literary review that was to unite progressive French writers until World War II. "Il participe à la création de la Nouvelle Revue Française qui devient une maison d'édition prestigieuse sous la direction de Gaston Gallimard."[29] During World War I Gide worked in Paris, first for the Red Cross, then in a soldiers' convalescent home, and finally in providing shelter to war refugees: "A partir d'octobre1914, et jusqu'en septembre 1915, Gide donne tout son temps au 'Foyer franco-belge,' oeuvre d'aide aux réfugiés des territoires envahis."[30] In 1916, he returned to Cuverville, his home since his marriage, and began to write again.

The war had intensified Gide's anguish, and early in 1916, he had begun to keep a second Journal (published in 1929 as Numquid et tu?) in which he recorded his search for

God. Finally, however, unable to resolve the dilemma, he stated that Catholicism is inadmissible and Protestantism is intolerable. Yet, he still felt profoundly Christian and resolved to achieve his own ethic by casting off his sense of guilt to become his true self. Now in a desire to liquidate the past, he began his autobiography, Si le grain ne meurt (1926), an account of his life from birth to marriage that is among the great works of confessional literature. In 1918, his friendship for the young Marc Allégret caused a serious crisis in his marriage, when his wife in jealous despair destroyed her dearest possession on earth--his letters to her.

> Gide traverse en 1915-16 une crise religieuse, d'où sortiront les méditations Numquid et tu. . .? Henri Ghéon se convertit au Catholicisme, tandis que Madeleine semble aussi se rapprocher de l'église romaine; en mai 1916, elle ouvre une lettre adressée du front par Ghéon à Gide, lettre qui lui en apprend beaucoup sur les moeurs et le passé de son mari. Après vingt années heureuses de mariage, première altération du bonheur du couple. Le 18 juin 1918, Gide part avec Marc pour un séjour de quatre mois en Angleterre: le 21 novembre, à Cuverville, il apprend de Madeleine que, sitôt après son départ pour l'Angleterre, elle a détruit toutes les lettres qu'il lui avait écrites depuis leur jeunesse.[31]

During the war, Gide became friends with the wife of a Belgian painter Théo Van Rysselberghe. This friendship lasted for more than fifteen years and led to an affair with their twenty-six year old daughter, Elisabeth, by whom Gide had a daughter. The liaison is described by Durosay:

> Peu après le début de la guerre, il consacre tout son temps, aux côtés de Charles Du Bos et de la femme du peintre belge Théo Van Rysselberghe (il est lié d'amitié avec les Van Rysselberghe depuis une quinzaine d'années), à une oeuvre d'aide aux réfugiés des territoires français et belges envahis par les Allemands, le Foyer Franco-Belge. En décembre, dans le train qui les ramène des funérailles de Verhaeren, Gide fait passer à Elisabeth Van Rysselberghe (fille des Théo et alors âgée de vingt-six ans) un billet lui disant qu'il aimerait avoir un enfant d'elle.[32]

> 18 avril, 1923: naissance à Annecy, de Catherine Gide, fille d'André Gide et d'Elisabeth Van Rysselberghe. Elle ne sera adoptée par son père qu'après la

> mort de Madeleine (1938). Il semble que celle-ci en ait eu connaissance, mais se montre d'une discretion absolue.[33]

After the war a great change took place in Gide, and his face began to assume the serene expression of his later years. By his decision to begin his autobiography and to complete Corydon, a Socratic dialogue in defense of homosexuality begun earlier, Gide had achieved at last an inner reconciliation. Corydon's publication, in 1924, was disastrous, though, and Gide was violently attacked, even by his closest friends. In 1938, Gide's wife, Madeleine, died. After a long estrangement they had been brought together by her final illness. To him she was always the great, perhaps the only, love of his life. With the outbreak of World War II, Gide began to realize the value of tradition and to appreciate the past. In a series of imaginary interviews written in 1941 and 1942 for Le Figaro, he expressed a new concept of liberty, declaring that absolute freedom destroys both the individual and society: freedom must be linked with the discipline of tradition. From 1942 until the end of the war, Gide lived in North Africa. There he wrote Theseus, whose story symbolizes Gide's realization of the value of the past. Theseus returns to Ariadne only because he has clung to the thread of tradition. Gide admits:

> Si je compare à celui d'Oedipe mon destin, je suis content ; je l'ai rempli. Derrière moi, je laisse la cité d'Athènes. Plus encore que ma femme et mon fils, je l'ai chérie. J'ai fait ma ville. Après moi, saura l'habiter immortellement ma pensée. C'est consentant que j'approche la mort solitaire. J'ai goûté des biens de la terrre. Il m'est doux de penser qu'après moi, grâce à moi, les hommes se reconnaîtront plus heureux, meilleurs et plus libres. Pour le bien de l'humanité future, j'ai fait mon oeuvre. J'ai vécu.[34]

In June 1947, Gide received the first honor of his life: the Doctor of Letters of the University of Oxford. The Nobel Prize for Literature followed it in November. "La carrière de l'écrivain est couronnée en 1947 par le prix Nobel de la littérature."[35] In

1950, he published the last volume of his Journal, which took the record of his life up to his eightieth birthday. All Gide's writings illuminate some aspect of his complex character. He is seen at his most characteristic, however, in the Journal he kept from 1889, a unique work of more than a million words in which he records his experiences, impressions, interests, and moral crises during a period of sixty years. After its publication, he resolved to write no more. Gide's lifelong emphasis on the self-aware and sincere individual as the touchstone of both collective and individual morality was complemented by the tolerant and enlightened views he expressed on literary, social, and political questions throughout his career. For most of his life a controversial figure, Gide was long regarded as a revolutionary for his open support of the claims of the individual's freedom of action in defiance of conventional morality. Before his death, he was widely recognized as an important humanist and moralist in the great 17th century French tradition. The integrity and nobility of his thought and the purity and harmony of style that characterize his stories, verse, and autobiographical works have ensured his place among the masters of French literature. Beigbeider observes:

> In the modern world, the vocation of the writer often has a threefold aim: first, to escape from a set of circumstances; second to do so in an indirect, sublimated way; and, finally, to reach out from one's particular situation to embrace the universal. Gide's particular set of circumstances was shaped almost entirely by family background and his Protestant upbringing. The Protestantism of the late nineteenth century instilled a personal dedication, a need for commitment, and a constant scrutiny of oneself and ones feelings. In Gide, this influence led to those examinations of conscience in which he indulged to the end of his days.[36]

Oedipe was written between June 17, 1929, and November 9, 1930. It was first published by the Editions de la Pléiade, and first performed by the Compagnie Pitoëff at

the Cercle Artistique of Antwerp on December 10, of that same year. His intentions were to create a work in which the reader does not identify himself with any of the characters of the play, which is unlike most other works of Gide:

> His intentions in this respect, as they clarified themselves in the course of the writing of the play, are straightforward enough. Oedipe is to eschew all attempts at stylistic grandeur or elaborate rhetorical effect. The style is to be resolutely modern, even colloquial, and the play is voluntarily to dispense with 'toutes les résonances amplificatrices,' which would be furnished, for example, by impressive images or rich verbal sonorities. No attempt is to be made to invite the reader or the spectator to identify himself emotionally with any of the characters.[37]

In a letter that Gide wrote to Ernst Robert Curtius, apropos of a forthcoming German production of the play, he gives some indication of the way in which he himself conceives Oedipe on stage:

> Ma pièce est un mélange (assez risqué et hasardeux, du reste) de tragique et de comique. Le rôle de Créon est tout entière et doit rester jusqu'à la fin comique. Il n'y a pas lieu de craindre de faire rire. Il importe même dès le début de donner à entendre au spectateur qu'il peut et doit rire. Les réflexions du choeur également l'y invitent et je n'ai pas craint, avec la troupe de Pitoëff, de pousser l'interprétation du côté de la parodie, de la satire, et presque de la farce populaire. . . . Il importe avant tout de ne pas tomber dans le poncif et le déclamatoire.[38]

At this stage in Gide's life, "he was no longer as willing, nor perhaps as able as he once was to surrender his own subjectivity to that of his protagonists."[39] Like Antigone in the play, he tells himself: "Oui, mon esprit a pris ce pli de ne pouvoir plus penser que droit."[40] It is to his reader's intelligence alone that he is determined to appeal:

> . . . . vous avez la pièce de Sophocle et je ne me pose pas en rival; je lui laisse le pathétique; mais voici ce que lui, Sophocle, n'a pas su voir et comprendre et qu'offrait pourtant son sujet; et que je comprends, non parce que je suis plus intelligent, mais parce que je suis d'une autre époque; et je pretends vous laisser voir l'envers du décor, cela dût-il nuire à votre émotion, car ce n'est pas elle qui

> m'importe et que je cherche à obtenir: c'est à votre intelligence que je m'adresse. Je me propose, non de vous faire frémir ou pleurer, mais de vous faire réfléchir.[41]

According to the author Michel Lioure,

> Après Saül et Le Roi Candaule, Gide recourt encore dans Oedipe à la trame des grands mythes antiques pour illustrer les angoisses modernes et exprimer ses propres préoccupations. Dans un dialogue tout classique, dont la finesse souriante n'a d'égale que l'élégante sobriété, les héros de la légende grecque débattent les plus hautes questions qui hantent la conscience universelle et proposent l'émouvante leçon de cet humanisme confiant et serein que caractérise la morale gidienne.[42]

For Oedipe, Gide said that the subject of his play is the struggle "entre le perspicace antimystique et le croyant; entre l'aveugle par foi et celui qui cherche à répondre à l'énigme; entre celui qui se soumet à Dieu et celui qui oppose à Dieu l'Homme."[43]

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT--PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Oedipe, Jocaste, Tirésias, and Créon played the most important roles in the play. The whole play is centered on Oedipe's life--his birth, his leadership and his death. He is ultimately portrayed as a good and courageous king who has self-pride, but also has the well-being of his subjects in mind. As a king who is concerned about the welfare of his people, he sends Créon to the Oracle to find a solution to the plague despite the fact that his family is spared. He even insists on finding and punishing the culprit although the late king's death has allowed him to accede to the throne: "Non, je n'ai pas à me calmer et voudrais avoir su cela plus tôt. Par l'enfer, je n'aurai de cesse que je n'aie retrouvé le coupable. Où qu'il se cache, je le pourchasse, et jure qu'il ne m'échappera pas."[44] His audacity to meet with the Sphinx and his victory over Laïus in battle show his strength

and courage. Even the fact that he leaves his adoptive parents to go to an unknown destination shows how disciplined and courageous he is. He does not want to inherit what does not legally belong to him: "J'ai les passé-droits en horreur et ne veux profiter de rien que ma valeur n'ait mérité. En moi sommeillaient des vertus que je ne supportais pas inactives. Je sentais qu'à la cour de Polybe, dans le calme et dans le confort, je manquais à ma destinée."[45] It is love and devotion to family values that make him leave his adoptive parents in order to avoid murdering his father and marrying his mother. As a husband and father to his children, he respects his wife and seeks her opinion over issues. He talks about his love for her. "Jocaste a toujours eu soin de protéger mon bonheur. Elle est parfaite, Jocaste. Quelle épouse! Quelle mère! Quant à moi qui n'ai jamais connu la mienne, j'ai pour elle amour quasi filial et conjugal à la fois."[46] He will not even hear the news from the Oracle in the absence of his wife and children. He says to Créon, "Arrête. Le peuple ne suffit pas. Qu'on fasse venir ici ta soeur Jocaste et nos quatre enfants."[47] When his sons express their incestuous desires towards their sisters, he teaches them to respect their sisters: "Mais, je voudrais vous dire d'abord . . . . Mes petits, respectez vos soeurs. Ce qui nous touche de trop près n'est jamais de conquête bien profitable. Pour se grandir, il faut porter loin de soi ses regards. Et puis, ne regardez pas trop en arrière."[48] Regardless of these good qualities, Oedipe's downfall is brought about by his shortcomings: temper and fate. It is his temper that causes his fight with Laïus, thereby, killing him. "Il voulait m' arrêter. Son char barrait ma route. M'étant pris de querelle avec lui, afin qu'il me laissât le champ libre, je le tuai."[49] Despite all his efforts to avoid killing his father and marrying his mother, he is fated to do so, and so he does.

Jocaste also plays a very important role in the play. Her role in the fulfillment of the Oracle's prophecy is inevitable, for she is not only Oedipe's mother, she later becomes his wife and the mother of his children. Oedipe's past is with her. It is her widowhood that gives Oedipe the opportunity to fulfill the second part of the prophecy. She is a very good wife to her husband and a good mother to her children. It is her love for her husband that makes her try to dissuade him from bothering himself over the death of her ex-husband. "Calme-toi, mon ami. C'est de l'histoire ancienne. Ne reviens pas sur le passé."[50] She also tells him that she has loved him from the moment she saw him. "Mais, mon ami, comment veux-tu qu'il m'en souvienne? De quoi vas-tu te tourmenter? Je ne sais qu'une chose, c'est que, dès que je t'ai vu, je t'ai voulu."[51] As a good mother, she cautions her husband when he does something wrong in front of her children. "Mon ami, tu ne devrais point parler ainsi devant les enfants. Il est imprudent de diminuer l'autorité de celui que nous leur avons donné pour maître, et qui doit les accompagner."[52] At the discovery of who her husband is, (her son, her husband, and the father of her children), she objects to his request to inform the people of Thebes and his children and reminds him that Laïus' death has brought him fortune. "Ah! Pourquoi faire connaître ainsi ce qui peut n'être su que de nous? Nul ne serait douté de rien. Il est temps encore. Le crime est oublié. Il n'a pas empêché, il a même permis ton bonheur. Rien n'est changé."[53] When he leaves the scene in sorrow, she quickly asks his brother Créon to take charge of him "Suis-le Créon. Ne le quitte pas un instant."[54] She then kills herself.

Tirésias is another principal character in the play. Although blind, he is a spiritual seer: "Si mes yeux de chair sont fermés, c'est pour mieux laisser s'ouvrir ceux de

l'âme."[55] He is believed in and trusted by his people. "Je m'en remets à toi, Tirésias, par qui nous connaissons les décisions du Très-Haut."[56] He is always consulted when spiritual matters come up and that is why the people suggest that he be consulted when the plague strikes. "C'est du moins ce que nous permet d'entrevoir l'enseignement de Tirésias. Il est bon que, là-dessus, nous en ayons le coeur net."[57] He believes in God and does not like Oedipe's self-inflation. When the plague strikes, he advises Oedipe:

> Seul à seul, Oedipe, nous parlerons de ton bonheur, de ce que tu nommes bonheur. Mais présentement il s'agit du malheur du peuple. Oedipe, le people souffre et son roi ne peut l'ignorer. Entre la prospérité de quelques-uns et la misère du plus grand nombre, Dieu tisse un lien mystérieux. Le nom de Dieu, Oedipe, est souvent dans ta bouche. De ceci je ne te blâme point, certes; mais bien de chercher en Dieu un approbateur plus qu'un juge, mais bien de ne trembler point devant lui.[58]

Through his spiritual powers, he knows who Oedipe is and that is why he advises him to open his eyes because God has deprived him of his right to be happy:

> L'oracle avait prédit de même à Laïus qu'il sera tué par son fils. Oedipe, enfant trouvé! Monarque impie! C'est l'ignorance de ton passé qui te donne cette assurance. Ton bonheur est aveugle. Ouvre les yeux sur ta détresse. Dieu t'a retiré le droit d'être heureux.[59]

In an effort to reveal the truth both to Oedipe and to the people, he advised Créon not to dissuade the king from his quest to find the murderer. "Créon, il n'est pas bon de rassurer Oedipe."[60] He helped reveal the truth by slowly helping Oedipe to find out his past through his explanation that the Oracle has predicted to King Laïus that his son will kill him. This is the same prediction that Oedipe receives from the Oracle, that he will kill his father. At the discovery of who Oedipe is, he preaches repentance to him, asking him to repent for the remission of his sins: "Oedipe, fils de l'erreur et du péché, nais à neuf! Il te manquait, pour être régénéré, la souffrance. Repens-toi! Viens à Dieu qui

t'attend! Ton crime te sera remis."[61] Before Oedipe's daughter, Antigone, leads him out of the city, he receives the message that God will bless the land where Oedipe's bones shall rest. "Avant de laisser partir Oedipe, écoutez tout ce que me révèlent les dieux. Une grande bénédiction est promise par eux à la terre où reposeront ses os."[62]

Créon is the brother of Jocaste who reigns in the interim after the death of Laïus. "Par moi d'abord, qui faisais alors l'intérim."[63] According to the Legend, he is the one who offers the throne and his sister Jocaste to whoever overcomes the Sphinx. During the time of the plague, he is sent to the oracle to find out the cause and the solutions to the plague. "Toi-même as bien voulu dépêcher, vers le sanctuaire du dieu, l'excellent Créon, ton beau-frère, qui doit nous rapporter bientôt la réponse de l'oracle très attendue."[64] On his return, he wants to talk to Oedipe alone: "Ne serait-il pas préférable que je te parle seul à seul?"[65] But Oedipe refuses. He prefers his passive role in the king's court to being king. "Sans être roi moi-même, j'aimais jouir à la cour de Laïus, j'aime jouir à la tienne, de tous les avantages de la couronne, sans en avoir les poids ni les soucis."[66] It is he who first tells Oedipe about the prediction given to the late king: ". . . .avait prédit que Laïus mourrait poignardé par son fils."[67] He also tells him about the unwanted child that is given to a shepherd to be abandoned in the mountains. "C'était un fils. On l'a, dès après sa naissance, remis à un berger chargé du triste soin de l'abandonner dans la montagne, où les bêtes le dévorèrent."[68] As King Oedipe is making inquiries concerning the late king, Créon advises him not to worry himself: "Tu m'en demandes trop. Veux-tu mon conseil? Ne te tourmente pas de cela. Vis tranquille."[69] He also says that whoever has killed Laïus has helped Oedipe to the throne:

> 'Laïus est mort pourtant, m'objecteras-tu. S'il vivait, tu n'auras pu t'asseoir sur son trône. Ne va donc pas te désoler aujourd'hui de sa perte, ni t'inquiéter de savoir comment il est mort. Si quelqu'un l'a tué, c'est pour toi; il a fait ton jeu; tu devrais, non pas le punir, mais le récompenser au contraire.'[70]

He does not approve of Oedipe's sons' incestuous plans against their sisters: "Ah! non, tu sais, l'inceste, moi je ne peux pas admettre ça."[71] He also expresses disgust at the discovery that Oedipe's wife is also his mother. "Ah! par exemple! Comment! Qu'apprends-je? Ma soeur serait sa mère! Oedipe, à qui je m'attachais! Se peut-il rien imaginer de plus abominable? Ne plus savoir s'il est ou mon beau-frère ou mon neveu!"[72] It is he who brings the news of Jocaste's suicide and Oedipe's blindness:

> L'horreur du châtiment a dépassé celle du crime. Jocaste votre mère n'est plus. Tandis que je surveillais Oedipe, elle a mis fin à ses jours. 'Ce que mes yeux n'auraient pas dû voir' (telles furent les paroles d'Oedipe), je l'ai vu. J'ai vu ma pauvre soeur pendue. Puis, aussitôt après, comme je m'empressais pour la secourir, Oedipe, s'élancant à son tour, s'empare du manteau royal, en arrache les agrafes d'or et les enfonce férocement dans ses yeux, dont l'humeur au sang mêlée m'éclabousse et ruisselle sur son visage. Ces cris que vous entendiez sont les siens, d'horreur d'abord, puis de douleur.[73]

He informs Oedipe of his banishment:

> Je me réjouis, mon cher Oedipe, de voir que ta douleur est, somme toute, supportable; car il me reste à t'annoncer une chose assez pénible. Après ce qui s'est passé, et maintenant que le peuple connaît ton crime, tu ne peux plus rester à Thèbes.[74]

He also offers to rule in the interim, as Oedipe's sons are still too young: "Etéocle et Polynice déjà convoitent le trône. S'ils sont peut-être un peu jeunes encore pour régner, je ferai de nouveau l'intérim."[75] When Tirésias announces that God will bless the land where Oedipe's bones shall rest, he asks him to stay in the city: "Allons, bon! . . . . Tu vois que tu ferais décidément mieux de rester parmi nous. On pourra toujours s'arranger."[76]

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

The secondary characters in the play, Oedipe, are Antigone, Polynice, Ismène, and Le Choeur. Antigone is the first daughter of Oedipe. She loves God: "De tout mon coeur et de tout mon esprit,"[77] and wants to be a nun: "Oedipe est consterné par la nouvelle que je viens de lui apprendre: Antigone veut entrer dans les ordres."[78] She has a heart for the suffering people and wants to be allowed to help relieve their pain.

> Elle me suppliait de la laisser soigner les malades. Je protestais que ce ne pouvait être l'occupation d'une princesse. 'Alors prier pour eux, intercéder pour eux' m'a-t-elle dit; puis, comme elle ajoutait à voix plus basse: 'et peut-être aussi pour. . . .', ses pleurs l'ont empêchée d' achever.[79]

Her father says she never lies: « Toi qui ne m'as jamais menti, apprends à celui qui n'a plus de regards, où se trouve Tirésias."[80] It is she who tells Polynice, her brother that a marriage between a brother and a sister is forbidden. "Oui, certes; défendu par les hommes et par Dieu."[81] She is so sensitive that her father's supposed happiness frightens her. "De mon père: et plus je l'aime, plus le bonheur auquel il prétend me fait peur. Il omet Dieu: et l'on ne peut poser, que sur Dieu seul, rien de solide."[82] People's suffering so affects her that she does not want her sister to laugh during a period of deep sadness. "Comment, lorsque le peuple est en deuil, peux-tu rire?"[83] When her father's sins are revealed, she does not want to be reminded of her shameful parentage: "Ah! ne rappelez pas cette honte. Je ne veux me savoir jamais rien d'autre que votre enfant."[84] She cautions her brothers who are pronouncing judgment upon their father: "Ne prononcez pas de cruelles paroles, que les dieux entendent et retourneront contre vous."[85] She says to them "Mon père n'a pas sciemment commis son crime."[86] When Oedipe blinds

himself, she volunteers to go with him. She swears never to leave him. Even when Tirésias reminds her that she has been set aside for God's service, she replies:

> Non, je ne romprai pas ma promesse. En m'échappant de toi, Tirésias, je resterai fidèle à Dieu. Même il me semble que je le servirai mieux, suivant mon père, que je ne faisais près de toi. Je t'écoutais m'enseigner Dieu jusqu'à ce jour; mais, plus pieusement encore, j'écouterai maintenant le seul enseignement de ma raison et de mon coeur. Père, pose ta main sur mon épaule. Je ne fléchirai pas. Tu peux te reposer sur moi. J'écarterai les ronces de ta route. Dis où tu veux aller.[87]

As they are ready to leave the city, Oedipe expresses his confidence in her: "Viens, ma fille. Toi, seule de mes enfants en qui je veuille me reconnaître et à qui je me fie, Antigone très pure, je ne me laisserai plus guidé que par toi."[88]

Polynice is one of the twin sons of Oedipe. During the plague, he is an eyewitness to the suffering of the people.

> Oui, père, nous avons surpris, non loin du palais, un groupe de pestiférés. Souillés de déjections, de vomissures, ils se tordaient dans des coliques affreuses et semblaient s'aider l'un l'autre à mourir. L'air tout alentour retentissait de leur hoquets, de leurs sanglots, de leurs soupirs, et leur regards . . . .[89]

He is in love with his sister Antigone and wants to marry her. "Parce que, si je t'épouse tout à fait, je crois que je me laisserais guider par toi jusqu'à ton Dieu."[90] He does not believe in God, but prefers heroism as his father has taught him. "Je crois moins volontiers aux dieux qu'aux héros."[91] When he finds out about his father (being also his brother and the murderer of King Laïus), his judgment is banishment. "Il ne peut plus rester dans le pays."[92]

Etéocle is the second twin son of Oedipe. He only appears briefly in the play. He is very close to his brother: "Polynice et moi, nés à la fois, élevés ensemble, nous avons eu tout en commun. Je ne goûte pas une joie et n'ai pas une pensée, je crois, qui ne soit

aussitôt la sienne, et qui, par son reflet en lui, ne se trouve aussitôt renforcée."[93] They have agreed to rule in turns after their father. "Nous nous sommes déjà promis que nous occuperions le trône tour à tour."[94] He wants to sleep with his sister Ismène. "Ainsi, par exemple, à présent, j'y cherche quelque phrase qui m'autorise à coucher avec Ismène." [95] At the discovery of who their father is, his judgment is "Il ne peut plus occuper le trône de Thèbes,"[96] but later says he and his brother will follow their father's example. "Nous suivrons l'exemple de notre père."[97]

Ismène is the younger of Oedipe's daughters. She is not a twin and would not like to be one: "Je ne suis pas sûre que cela me plairait beaucoup d'avoir un double, ni même que ce double je ne le détesterais pas. Du reste, il est des choses que l'on ne peut partager."[98] According to her, she is very different from her sister Antigone and cannot get along with her.

> Antigone et moi, nos goûts diffèrent tellement, que je la querelle sans cesse. Tout ce que j'aime, elle le blâme et me dit que c'est défendu. Je n'ose même plus rire ou jouer devant elle. Je sais bien qu'elle est plus âgée que moi, mais c'est à croire qu'elle n'a jamais été jeune.[99]

She likes being happy and believes that crying over unfortunate people does not suppress their misery. "C'est en moi-même qu'est la joie, et je l'entends chanter dans mon coeur. En pleurant sur les malheureux, on ne supprime pas leur misère."[100]

Le Choeur represents the citizens of Thebes : "Nous, Choeur, qui avons pour mission particulière, en ce lieu, de représenter l'opinion du plus grand nombre, nous nous déclarons surpris et peinés par la profession d'une individualité si farouche."[101] They are the ones suffering from the plague.

> Que toi, tu sois heureux, encore que tu le dises un peu trop, nul n'en doute. Mais nous ne sommes pas heureux, nous, ton people, ô Oedipe; mais nous, ton peuple, ah! non, nous ne sommes pas heureux. On voudrait te cacher cela; mais l'action de ce drame ne saurait s'engager sans que nous te fassions part d'une nouvelle très lamentable. La peste, puisqu'il faut l'appeler par son nom, continue d'endeuiller la ville. Ta famille a été jusqu'à présent préservée; mais il sied qu'un roi ne se désintéresse pas des malheurs de son people, encore qu'il n'en soit pas directement touché.[102]

They believe that the plague has come because they have sinned: "Les salmis d'oiseaux étaient bons; mais nous avons compris que nous avions péché, à ceci que Dieu, courroucé, couvrit de chenilles nos récoltes,"[103] and therefore suggest that Tirésias be consulted in order to find a solution to their problem. " . . .C'est du moins ce que nous permet d'entrevoir l'enseignement de Tirésias. Il est bon que, là-dessus, nous en ayons le coeur net. Apollon doit nous renseigner."[104] At the advice of Tirésias, they disperse and go home to pray and repent each of their sins.

> La police du roi peut rechercher un criminel. Mais, en attendant qu'elle le trouve, j'exhorte chacun de vous à la pénitence; car, coupable, chacun de vous l'est devant Dieu, et nous ne saurions imaginer aucun homme sans souillure. Donc, que chacun de vous descende en soi-même, et s'examine et se répente. Cependant quelques offrandes tâcheront d'apaiser Celui dont l'irritation éprouve si rudement la ville. Les morts déjà ne se comptent plus.[105]

In the final act, when they are summoned to hear the news that the king is the murderer of the late king, the son and husband of Jocaste, their speech gives the summary of the play:

> Où va la reine? – Se cacher, parbleu! – Où est Oedipe? - Il se cache aussi. Il a honte. – Coucher avec sa mère pour lui faire à son tour des enfants . . . - Tout ça, c'est des histoires de famille; cela ne nous regarde pas. Ça regarde les dieux qui s'en irritent. – Et puis il y a le meurtre de Laïus, qu'Oedipe, son fils a commis. – Qu'Oedipe lui-même a promis de venger. – On peut dire qu'il s'est mis là dans de mauvais draps. – Le justicier doit s'en prendre à soi, et s'est désigné pour victime. – Sans doute, afin d'apaiser les dieux, ne fallait-il pas moins d'un roi,

> tant notre misère était grande. – Du reste, n'est-il pas naturel qu'un roi, pour son peuple, se sacrifie? – Oui, si ce sacrifice doit nous délivrer de nos maux.[106]
>
> Oedipe, qui te disais heureux, mais qui faisais de l'ignominie ta litière, puissons-nous ne t'avoir jamais connu! Tu nous as délivrés du Sphinx, il est vrai; mais ton mépris des dieux nous vaut des misères sans nombre, que ne compensent pas les biens que nous te devons. Toute félicité qu'on obtient en dépit des dieux est une félicité mal acquise et que les dieux tôt ou tard font payer.[107]

In the next chapter The Gods Are Not to Blame, Ola Rotimi's play, based on the same legend, will be discussed and because he changed the story and his characters to suit his audience and his culture, a summay of the play will be given.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Lafille, André Gide : Romancier (Paris: Hachette, 1954), 469.

[2] Marc Beigbeder, Nobel Prize Library: Gide, Gjellerup, Heyse (Paris: Helvetica Press, 1971), 107.

[3] Daniel Durosay, Vie d'André Gide, available from http://www.u-paris10.fr.

[4] G.W. Ireland, André Gide: A Study of His Creative Writings (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 9.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] André Gide, Si le grain ne meurt (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), 3.

[8] Ireland, 9.

[9] Beigbeder, 105.

[10] Gide, 9.

[11] Delay, 126.

[12] Ibid., 358.

[13] Ibid., 126.

[14] Gide, 367.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Gide, Journal (Paris: Gallimard, 1892), 31.

[17] Gide, Si le grain ne meurt, 128.

[18] Delay, 150.

[19] Gide, Si le grain ne meurt, 164.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.,187.

[22] Delay, 372.

[23] Beigbeder, 109.

[24] Claude Martin, Bibliographie Chronologique des livres consacrés à André Gide (1918-1995) (Lyon: Centre d'Etudes Gidiennes, 1995), 84.

[25] Beigbeder, 110.

[26] Durosay, http://www.u-paris10.fr.

[27] Margaret Lake, André Gide, available from http://www.ex.ac.uk.

[28] Gide, La Porte étroite in Romans (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 501.

[29] Martin, 84.

[30] Bernard Delvaille, André Gide : Chronologie, available from http://www.france3.fr.

[31] Durosay, http://www.u-paris10.fr.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Delvaille, http://www.france3.fr.

[34] Gide, Thésée in Romans (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 1453.

[35] Martin, 86.

[36] Beigbeder, 107.

[37] Ireland, 394.

[38] Ibid., 395.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Gide, Oedipe (Paris, Gallimard, 1931), 58.

[41] Ireland, 396.

[42] Michel Lioure, Le Drame (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1963), 324.

[43] Ireland, 401.

[44] Gide, Oedipe, 24.

[45] Ibid., 56.

[46] Ibid., 33-4.

[47] Ibid., 20.

[48] Ibid., 78.

[49] Ibid., 99.

[50] Ibid., 23.

[51] Ibid., 97.

[52] Ibid., 25.

[53] Ibid., 105.

[54] Ibid., 108.

[55] Ibid., 85.

[56] Ibid., 45.

[57] Ibid., 18.

[58] Ibid., 26.

[59] Ibid., 89.

[60] Ibid., 39.

[61] Ibid., 103.

[62] Ibid., 121.

[63] Ibid., 33.

[64] Ibid., 18.

[65] Ibid., 19.

[66] Ibid., 57.

[67] Ibid., 35.

[68] Ibid., 36.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 37.

[71] Ibid., 62.

[72] Ibid., 101.

[73] Ibid., 113.

[74] Ibid., 117.

[75] Ibid., 118.

[76] Ibid., 121.

[77] Ibid., 59.

[78] Ibid., 41.

[79] Ibid., 42.

[80] Ibid., 115.

[81] Ibid., 61.

[82] Ibid., 68.

[83] Ibid., 66.

[84] Ibid., 115.

[85] Ibid., 111.

[86] Ibid., 112.

[87] Ibid., 119.

[88] Ibid., 123.

[89] Ibid., 30.

[90] Ibid., 61.

[91] Ibid., 91.

[92] Ibid., 111.

[93] Ibid., 64.

[94] Ibid., 65.

[95] Ibid., 71.

[96] Ibid., 111.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 64.

[99] Ibid., 63.

[100] Ibid., 67.

[101] Ibid., 16.

[102] Ibid., 17.

[103] Ibid., 28.

[104] Ibid. 18.

[105] Ibid., 29.

[106] Ibid., 109.

[107] Ibid., 110.

CHAPTER III

OLA ROTIMI'S THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

> One of the most successful Nigerian playwrights writing in English, Ola Rotimi effectively conveys to both Nigerian and foreign audiences the culture and concerns of the African peoples. He specifically addresses the historical and political problems of Nigeria in a bold, sweeping style that, critics say, engrosses audiences in his productions.[1]

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi was born on April 13, 1938, the youngest of three children of Samuel Enitan Rotimi, a steam-launch engineer from the Yoruba ethnic group of Western Nigeria, and Dorcas Oruene, an Ijaw from Nembe in Eastern Nigeria. Born on a continent and in an era where language barriers and ethnic differences hinder relationships, he has, nevertheless, achieved wide acclaim. His grandparents came from Sierra Leone and Ghana. His parents' ethnic difference influenced his knowledge of four of the three hundred languages spoken in Nigeria, as well as English, the official language of the country. His mother excelled in traditional dance and managed her own dance group from 1945 to 1949. His father often wrote for, performed in, and organized the community theater in Port Harcourt where Ola (as he is fondly called) grew up. His uncle, Chief Robert Dede, was the lead performer in a traditional dance troupe called "A Masquerade." He and his dancers dressed in elaborate costumes, danced, sang, and acted in what was one of the most spectacular of such troupes in Rivers State. These family interests in the arts helped motivate the young Ola who first appeared on stage at age four

in a play directed and produced by his father. Frequent visits to his mother's home for festivals gave him an understanding of the Ijaw culture, which differs in certain respects from the Yoruba culture. He attended the Methodist Boys' High School in Lagos, from 1952 to 1956, during which time he was nicknamed "Shakespeare incarnate" or "the Poet" because of his writings. Some of his works were broadcast on Nigerian radio and published in institutional magazines. He studied theater at Boston University on a scholarship from the Nigerian government. It was at this time in 1963, however, that he produced his maiden play To Stir the God of Iron. Like most initial artistic efforts, the production was not well received, attracting an unfavorable review by the Boston University News of May 7, 1963, but his sociopolitical comedy, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, was awarded Yale's student play of the year in 1966. Since then Rotimi has become a household name among the educated of Nigeria, for according to Alex C. Johnson:

> The production of Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again and The God's Are Not to Blame at the Yale School of Drama in 1966 and the Ife Festival of Arts in 1968 respectively, signaled the emergence of a new talent on the African stage. Rotimi has since published two historical plays, Kurunmi and Ovonramwem Nogbaisi, and produced others such as Cast the First Stone, Holding Talks and more recently If . . . .[2]

The driving force of his artistic endeavor is to achieve what he calls total theater. Rotimi extends the boundaries of traditional Western Theater by embracing dance, mime, music, and song, as well as the ritual aspect of traditional African life. Because he believes that theater should be a medium of the people, Rotimi elicits audience participation, targeting as his audience the literate minority who speak English--those who determine the social course of the nation.

From 1963 to 1966 he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in playwriting and dramatic literature at Yale University on a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship. While in the United States, he married former Hazel Mae Gaudreau in 1965, with whom he later had four children: Enitan, Oruene, Biodun Ola, Jr., and Bankole.

Rotimi had the privilege of staging his play under the direction of a New York professional, the late Jack Landau. He recalls what a valuable experience this was for him:

> You see, it is one thing to learn directing in a classroom situation where you are called upon to stage a short scene or a one-act play with fellow drama students. Now, to work with someone who has had years of experience in professional directing is, indeed, a different phenomenon altogether, an entirely challenging exposure.[3]

After his master's degree program, he returned to Nigeria to take a position as Senior Research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). He also directed the university theatre company, the Ori-Olokun players, coaching them into a first-rate professional company, which had the honor of being invited by the French government to the World Festival of Theatre at Nancy in 1971 where the Ife theatre group proved a living laboratory, enabling Rotimi to carry out his creative experiments under the best possible conditions. He is presently the head of the Creative Arts section and Arts Director at the University of Port-Harcourt, Nigeria, where he did a study of traditional African drama and African ritual drama. In 1967, while in Ife, and at a time when Nigeria was in the throes of a civil war, he composed his highly successful The Gods Are Not to Blame, based on Sophocles'

Oedipus Rex, which he directed first at Ori-Olokun Cultural Center in Ife in 1968 and later at London's Drum Arts Center in 1978. He stresses the play's national and political impact over its mythological story:

> The title . . . does not refer to the mythological gods or mystic deities of the African pantheon. Rather it alludes to national political powers such as America, Russia, France, England, etc., – countries that set the pace of world politics. The title implies that these political 'gods' shouldn't be blamed . . . for our own national failings . . . . In essence, the war took strength from tribal animosities, which had been fostered by the politics of the day, and compounded by insatiable corruption in high quarters. So I asked: why hold outside powers responsible for the resultant bloodshed?[4]

This successful Africanization of the myth which is innovative both on the level of the medium and in the development of the African theatre is what established his reputation. This play is remarkable in its use of broken verse and powerful African imagery. He appealed to his people. His dramatic works are known throughout Africa and have made him one of the most significant playwrights on the continent.

In an interview with Mike Lillich of the DePauw University Alumnus, Rotimi said:

> But I was inundated with Americanisms. I had to link up with my people. So my immediate audience has been the Nigerian people within my own cultural context. Any other kind of writing for me would be artificial. Once my people accept me, the world will look at me. It has taken me a long time to get out and test the world market.[5]

These works have been performed in Europe and Africa and are the focus of study in Europe and in American universities in African studies programs. He also published short stories and critical articles on African theatre. According to Joel Adedeji in Dictionary of Literary Biography,

> Rotimi's genius and significance as a dramatist lie in his successful modification of traditional dramatic form and content and his creation of a language appropriate to the mass audience he wishes to address . . . . His importance will emerge with time, for he will continue to develop new ways of articulating political ideas through the medium of popular theatre.[6]

The adaptation of the Oedipus myth in The Gods Are Not to Blame has proved most popular with African audiences whose culture and religion resemble those of the Greeks. Indeed, E. J. Asgill affirms:

> The mythologies of Greek religion and literature have their referents in African, but most strikingly in Yoruba, culture. The hierarchical Olympian godheads, with specific attributes and roles, incessantly involved in the fortunes of men in their human world, replete with systems of priests, seers, oracles and so on, are complemented fully in Yoruba theogonic structures.[7]

According to O. R. Dathorne, Rotimi makes use of proverbial speaking and of Yoruba daily life and customs. There is a feeling that this is a very successful re-creation, not merely an attempt at rewriting the legend in Yoruba terms. Similarly, the critic Johnson supports this view when he states:

> It is his commitment to his audience which decided the distinctive character of the medium in this play. His intention was to reach a very wide, many-layered audience, hence his attempt to create a new idiom, a kind of language close to the rhythms and speech patterns of his native language but not deviating too radically from standard English and adequate to carry the weight of his themes. It is in these two areas--language and African theater--as much as in the themes themselves that his significance as a new talent depends . . . .[8]

He departs from the original plot, but de-emphasizes the responsibility of the gods by creating in his hero, Odewale, an ethnocentric individual ready to hurt and kill when his ethnic pride is injured. Odewale says, "No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved

to the defense of his tribe against others."[9] At the end, he also accepts responsibility for his fall when he says: "Let no one stop us or let no one come with us or I shall curse him . . . . When the wood-insect gathers sticks, on its own head it carries them."[10] E. J. Asgill in African Adaptations of Greek Tragedies, writes:

> Incidentally, and strangely too, Rotimi at this point seems to peg the weakness down to a patriotic fanaticism. The tragic potential build-up of the play is more than this: Odewale's rashness betrays each time a crookedness of thought, as for example not insisting on a definite answer from the oracle to his specific question; not being circumspect enough to avoid marrying a woman old enough to be his mother; and not being patient enough for tangible reasons to conclude on Fakunle's collusion with Aderopo against his throne, which rash conclusion finally impelled him, after biting the sword of Ogun on oath, unwaveringly to his self-discovery. The blame on Odewale can be traced specifically to his compulsive drive to struggle beyond his capabilities.[11]

According to Kemi-Atanda Ilori, "The major strength of Rotimi appears to lie in the excellent combination of the tragic and the comic, of music with action, and of mime with choreographed movements. With the Gods, Rotimi seems to have discovered his own elements . . . ."[12] Asgill supports this view by stating:

> It would seem that Rotimi saw instinctively the stage potentials of rendering Oedipus Rex in an African context, amplifying and intensifying the action through a myriad of forms other than verbal and introducing only such innovations as would improve its dramatic impact. Otherwise such innovations are peripheral to the original conceptual vision of Sophocles in spite of the new didactic title. This argument so far, if tenable, would seem to be leading to the conclusion that Rotimi's treatment of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is specifically an Africanization rather than an adaptation.[13]

According to Banham and Wake,

> The Gods Are Not to Blame is a reworking of Oedipus Rex in Yoruba terms, but it assumes an identity of its own, and is a remarkable piece of theatre. The classic tale is given vivid life by its transposition to Africa, and some new dimensions. It is noticeable, for instance, that [Ola] Rotimi's play contains much humor--but it is not humor that detracts from the awfulness of the theme. Rather, in the tragicomic method of [Sean] O'Casey, Rotimi is able to maintain the

> integrity of the subject while exploring a wide range of human emotions and reactions.[14]

Like Molière, the Seventeenth Century French playwright who died on stage acting in his own play, Rotimi states that his ambition is to write a play, then collapse and die on stage while acting in it. Lindfors quotes Rotimi as having indicated:

> My ultimate artistic ambition is to write a full-length massiveness in music, dance and movement lasting two whole hours and half directed by me, mobilizing a 500-man cast. And then? Queried Lindfors. I collapse and die after making my last exit on stage acting in it![15]

In this work, a summary of the play and the character development will be given.

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

In the land of Kutuje, King Adetusa and his wife, Ojuola, had a son. As the custom demands, the baby is taken to the shrine of Ogun, the god of War, of Iron, and doctor of all male children. The priest of Ifa is consulted to divine the future of the child. He tells the parents that the child is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. On hearing the bad news, the king decides to kill the boy to avert the future. He then ties his feet with a string of cowries (meaning sacrifice to the gods), and gives him to Gbonka, his special messenger, so that he can take him to the evil grove in the bush. On getting to the bush, the messenger who has pity on the poor child meets Alaka, a hunter from Ijekun, and gives him the child. Alaka, in turn, gives the boy to his childless master, Ogundele, to raise as his own. He is named Odewale, and he grows up very strong and

courageous. A few years later, King Adetusa and his wife, Ojuola, have another son, Aderopo, and everybody is happy.

One day, while Odewale is working on his father's farm, his uncle comes and tells him that he, Odewale, is a butterfly who thinks himself a bird (implying that he is not a rightful heir). This bothers him and he goes to a priest of Ifa to find out who he is. He is told that there is a curse on him from which he cannot run away. He is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. The only solution he thinks he has is to run away from the land and never come back until his parents are dead. He makes Alaka, who remains his close friend, swear to find him only after the death of his unbeknownst adoptive parents. He goes away to a far land and settles among people who sell him some pieces of land for farming. One day, he meets a stranger, an old man with servants, harvesting his crops. While questioning him, the old man insults him by mocking his tribe. Infuriated, he kills the old man in a battle but one of his men survives and flees. Knowing that he has shed blood on the land, Odewale abandons it and moves away to live among the people of another tribe.

Meanwhile, in the land of Kutuje, a supposed eyewitness reports that the king has been assassinated by a band of robbers. The neighboring village, Ikolu, taking advantage of the empty throne has been making war against them, killing, capturing, enslaving and taking lands and property. Odewale hears about it and voluntarily goes to Kutuje, organizes the men, and fights against Ikolu. Having overcome, he restores properties and land to the people. As an expression of their gratitude, they make him king and give him Ojuola, the widow of the late king, as wife. Together they will have four children.

A few years later, a plague comes to the land of Kutuje. Sickness and death are in every household, including that of the king. The people go to their leader to complain. He, however, has already sent Aderopo, his adopted son and the son of the late king, to the oracle to inquire of them the solution. The king informs them that he has sent for the help of the oracle, but meanwhile, they need to combat the plague by using herbs while waiting for the oracle's advice. They disperse while the king and his chiefs gather to listen to the oracle's message. They are told that King Adetusa's death has to be avenged, and that the murderer lives among them. King Odewale then swears to seize the murderer before sunrise and bring him to justice through the agony of slow death, shame, plucking out his eyeballs and expulsion from the land.

Later, Baba Fakunle, the seer who Aderopo has gone to fetch, comes, and in a quarrel, tells Odewale that he is not only the murderer, but also a bedsharer. For this reason, the king threatens and banishes from his presence Aderopo whom he accuses of conspiring with the seer to put him to shame and take over the throne. But it is not much later that a man who identifies himself as Alaka, a childhood friend of the king, comes to give him the news of his father's death. The king, on hearing this, summons the chiefs to prove to them that oracles lie; he explains that he left his hometown because of an oracle's prophecy that he would kill his father. It is then that Alaka tells him that the hunter, Ogundele, and his wife were not his parents; rather they adopted him after he was picked up from the bush taken from a messenger from king Adetusa's palace. At the order of the king, Gbonka, who was the special messenger of the late king at the time of death, is summoned to confirm that the late king has been killed by one man instead of a

band of robbers as was previously reported. He also acknowledges that he gave the unwanted child to the hunter. Odewale then realizes that the old man he killed was his father and that his wife, Ojuola, was not only the mother of his children, but also his mother. Not being able to bear the shame, Ojuola commits suicide, Odewale pierces his eyes with a sword, then he and his four children leave the city.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

The author used the Narrator to introduce the people to the story of the baby's birth, the prophecy, and the casting away of the child before the beginning of the play. His part is to give the audience background knowledge of who Odewale is, while Odewale himself does not know.

King Odewale is the hero of the play. He unknowingly inherits his father's throne and marries his mother after killing his father, as has been predicted at his birth. His greatest problem is his temper. In anger, he kills the man on his farm, just because his tribe is mocked. It is also temper that pushes him to offend the soothsayer who in retaliation calls him a murderer and a bedsharer, and later, in anger still, he banishes Aderopo, whom he accuses of plotting against him. He swears constantly and makes his decisions too quickly. He hastily decides on the punishment of the culprit: "Slowly. We will kill him slowly, so that he spends the rest of his living days dying with each moment that passes."[16] He is also quick to accuse the people and Aderopo of plotting against him and quick to swear to seize the murderer before sunrise. When he is banishing Aderopo, he says: "You are all taking sides, are you? [*Seizes sword from PRIEST's*

hand.] May my eyes not see Aderopo again till I die! [*Bites, then drops sword and goes into his bedroom . . . .*][17]

Although he has these shortcomings, he is portrayed as a kind king. He asks his second wife, Abero, to take care of Iya Aburo's baby, when the latter goes mad after the loss of her husband. He also orders that she be taken to a medicine man and agrees to pay the charges. It is also his kindness towards Kutuje people that has led him to the throne. As a husband, he loves his wife and constantly praises her: "Ojuola! Great woman! Ideal of all women! My backbone, my everything-knower of the truth! [*Embraces her.*] Wise one . . . you are right . . . always in the right."[18] He loves his subjects and is ready to do anything to stop their suffering. He even threatens to kill the soothsayer who remains silent and does not want to help:

> I shall count to three . . . Baba, feel this . . . [Lets him feel his sword.] I have sworn by Ogun to expose the murderer before the eyes of all at the feast of Ogun that ends tonight. I brought you all the way from Oyo to help us; and you are headstrong. My people ail and die; you are headstrong and silent.[19]

Queen Ojuola is first married to King Adetusa and later Odewale after the death of the first one. It is later discovered that her husband Odewale, who is the father of her four children, is also her son who she thinks has died in the bush as a baby because the soothsayer has said he has brought bad luck. Her role is very important in the play, because she has had to marry Odewale for the second part of the prophecy to be fulfilled. She is a good wife who protects and takes her husband's side on issues, even against her own son Aderopo. She asks her younger children not to bother their father when he is unhappy and quickly calms him down: "The old man's mind is not sound. My lord

should not take his words seriously."[20] She is loved and respected by all, including the stranger, Alaka: "Kind woman, you've taken good care of my brother. I thank you."[21]

Baba Fakunle is a soothsayer and a priest of Ifa. In the prologue, he is the one who predicts that Odewale, as a baby, is to kill his father and marry his mother. He also tells the people that one man has killed King Adetusa and is of his own blood. When he is consulted during the plague, he tells King Odewale that he is not only a murderer, but he is a bed-sharer. As a priest, he refuses to take more money than is required and this shows his honesty. "Hand him back nine. All I am taking is one cowry for Esu the messenger of Ifa and Olodumare. No more."[22] The character, Boy, in the play is his escort, who leads him about because he is blind.

Aderopo is the second son of King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola, born two years after the casting away of their first son. During the plague, he is the one sent to inquire from the Oracle the cause and solution to their problem. He is also the one who suggests that Baba Fakunle can be consulted and because of this, Odewale accuses him of plotting evil against him and is therefore banished from the land.

The Ogun priest is one of the King's companions and the one who, in the prologue, orders Gbonka to take the baby to the bush and kill him. He is the first to realize who Odewale is when Alaka describes how he has been in the bush when he is picked up. He then tries to dissuade the King from finding out whose son he is but, having been threatened by the King, he says: "The woman who has just gone into the bedroom. Bearer of your four children. She too is your . . . mother!"[23]

Although he does not speak, King Adetusa's presence is noticed in the prologue as he, his wife, and the townspeople present the baby to the priest of Ifa and his reaction when the baby is to be killed. His actions are also shown while Odewale is recalling his experience on the farm with him. He meets his death through his son Odewale, as has been predicted by the Oracle.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Alaka is Odewale's childhood friend whose role helps clear issues. He is with his master when Odewale is picked up in the bush and has taught him all that he knows. "Wife, this is my friend of all friends, my brother . . . no, my master. He taught me every thing in my father's house in Ijekun."[24] His visit helps Odewale find out his roots when he tells the king of his parentage.

Gbonka is a special messenger to King Adetusa and is the one who is ordered in the prologue to take the baby to the bush to kill but, out of pity, gives him to Alaka and his master, the great hunter Ogundele. He is the only servant, out of five that were with King Adetusa at the time of death, who returns to report the king's death. His presence also helps clear issues as he acknowledges giving the baby to Alaka's master and also confirms that one man killed the late king.

The first, second, and third Chiefs are members of the king's council. He consults with them over issues, and that is why the citizens complain to them during the plague: "When the head of a household dies, the house becomes an empty shell. But we have you as our head, and with you, our Chiefs; yet we do not know whether to thank the gods that you are with us, or to look elsewhere for hope"[25] Although they work together, the

king accuses them of plotting against him. They still trust him and tell him that old age is bothering the Seer and they order the bodyguards to chase the old man away.

Abero is King Odewale's second wife. It is in the creation of her character that the author shows polygamy in the African culture. She only appears a few times in the play because culturally, the first wife, the queen takes the upper hand.

Iya Aburo is a mad woman whose character shows the gravity of the people's suffering. She becomes insane after the loss of her husband who has died of the sickness in the land. The king orders that she be sent to the medicine man and her baby is given to the king's second wife, Abero, for her keeping.

The royal children: Adewale, Adebisi, Oyeyemi, and Adeyinka are the four children of King Odewale and Queen Ojuola. Their birth is important in that they are the outcome of the incestuous relationship between their parents. The only times they appear in the play are when they are brought in to show that the sickness is also in the King's house and when their mother is telling them stories before the entrance of their father in Act II scene iii. At the end of the play, they all leave with their father to an unknown destination.

The royal bard is the praise singer whose duty is to sing and dance to the praise of the king and his queen in combination with the drummers, while the royal bodyguards are those who watch over and protect the king and his household. They also serve as messengers to the king.

The townspeople are the people of Kutuje whose welfare has led to the discovery of the fulfilled predictions. The death of their king and their defeat in the hands of the

Ikolu people have led to the enthronement of Odewale and his marriage to his mother. It is also their suffering that has led to the action of the play.

In the next chapter a comparative analysis of both plays will be given despite the fact that they are written in two different languages, from two different continents and for two different audiences.

[1] The Gale Group, Contemporary Authors, avalaible from http://www.galenet.com.

[2] Alex C. Johnson, "Ola Rotimi: How Significant?" in African Literature Today, vol. XII, edited by E.D. Jones (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982), 137.

[3] Bernth Lindfors, Dem-Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers (Austin Texas: 1974), 58.

[4] Lindfors, 61.

[5] Michael Lablanc, Contemporary Black Biography, Profiles from the International Black Community, vol. I (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 206.

[6] Joel Adedeji, Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 125: Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers (Gale: 1993), 78.

[7] E.J. Asgill, "African Adaptations of Greek Tragedies" in African Literature Today: Myth & History, vol. XI, edited by E.D. Jones (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 175.

[8] Johnson, 137.

[9] Ola Rotimi, The Gods Are Not to Blame (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 71.

[10] Ibid., 72.

[11] Asgill, 183.

[12] Kemi-Atanda Ilori, "Ola Rotimi" in Perspectives on Nigerian Literature, 1700 to the Present, vol. 2, edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi (Nigeria: Guardian Books, 1988), 207.

[13] Asgill, 184.

[14] Martin Banham and Clive Wake, African Theatre Today (London: Pitman, 1976), 43.

[15] Lindfors, 68.

[16] Rotimi, 21.

[17] Ibid., 35.

[18] Ibid., 58.

[19] Ibid., 27.

[20] Ibid., 58.

[21] Ibid., 50.

[22] Ibid., 28.

[23] Ibid., 68.

[24] Ibid., 44.

[25] Ibid., 9.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS

André Gide's Oedipe (1931) and Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not to Blame (1971) are European and African adaptations respectively of the mythological work Oedipus Rex by the Greek philosopher, Sophocles. Although these two plays are written in two different languages and on two different continents, the authors succeeded in maintaining the integrity of the original play, while recreating it to suit their era and culture. Despite the similarity of origin, there are other similarities and contrasts in the authors' adaptations of the legend. Each play consists of three acts; but the scenes of Gide's play are not specified, whereas the ones of Rotimi's work are distinct. There is action in each play but Oedipe lacks music, dances, proverbial exhortations, and the obeisance which Rotimi uses to Africanize his play.

In the original work of Sophocles, the audience is aware of Oedipus' past of which he himself is ignorant. Rotimi uses a narrator to create this effect in a prologue, where the narrator gives the audience a preview of the past before the actual play, the relevance of which will be shown at the end of the play.

Gide retains the original characters and their Greek names although he adds some French accents: Tirésias, Créon, Etéocle, Ismène, Laïus, and a spelling change as in

Jocaste, but Rotimi uses more characters with Yoruba names which provide greater interaction and scope of inventiveness, such as Odewale's rapport with the citizens on herbal remedies against the pestilence. The characters of King Adetusa, his messengers, and even Alaka, the hunter's apprentice, are shown in The Gods Are Not to Blame, while King Laïus and the shepherds are implied in Oedipe. Aderopo, as a son to Ojuola and King Adetusa rather than brother to Jocaste as Créon is in Gide's Oedipe, lends a greater justification to Odewale's misgivings and accusation of the former as an ambitious usurper, for if not for the latter's deliverance of the people from the enemy, the throne belongs to the former, being the late king's son. This also explains the rapport between Oedipe and Créon and its absence in Rotimi's play, for while Oedipe confides in Créon, his brother-in-law, Odewale confides in Alaka, his friend and an outsider. In Gide's play, Oedipe's children take an active part in the play: expressing their beliefs in God (by Antigone), and in heroism (by the boys), discussing their incestuous desires, condemning and banishing their father. In contrast, Rotimi's royal children are presented as innocent victims of their parents' sins.

As in the original work, Gide uses the right of passage as the cause of quarrel between Oedipe and King Laïus and victory over the Sphinx as the cause of Oedipe's coronation, but in order to appeal to his African audience and their culture, Rotimi uses land dispute and ethnic pride as the cause of the fight and tribal war as a reason to bring Odewale's attention to Kutuje. These are common causes of socioeconomic problems of his nation, Nigeria. While there is a physical combat between King Laïus and Oedipe, it is ritualistic incantations and charms that help Odewale to weaken King Adetusa and put

his guards to sleep, thereby justifying the possibility of one man defeating a king with five bodyguards.

According to the legend and in the original Greek work, the baby's ankles are pierced, hence the name Oedipe. Gide keeps this version, but Rotimi has to use the tradition of his people and presents a baby with feet tied with a string of cowries, meaning sacrifice to the Gods that sent him. It is through discussions with the seer Tirésias that Oedipe discovers who he is and whom he has killed, while in The Gods Are Not to Blame, Gbonka, the late King's messenger and a witness to his death, and Alaka, Odewale's childhood friend, who is in the company of his master at the time of the baby exchange, have to come and prove who Odewale is and whom he has killed. It is also an uncle's mockery of illegitimacy that leads Odewale to find out about the prediction of killing his father and marrying his mother while Oedipe finds out through a seer who comes to King Polybe's house and it is Polybe who tells him of his adoption while Odewale has to wait till the end of the play to find out about his parentage. In Gide's work, Oedipe narrates this story to Créon while Rotimi has to use recall and reenacting to show the discussion between Odewale and the seer when he enquires about who he is and also his encounter with King Adetusa. Gide's Oedipe has no regard for God and believes in humanism while Odewale not only believes in the Gods but also prays and swears by them. While Oedipe is led away by Antigone, one of his four children, Odewale and all his four children leave the city.

In Rotimi's play, one can see the irony of good intentions. Odewale's good intention to distance himself from his parents leads to the death of his real father, and his

kindness to the people of Kutuje leads to his marriage to his mother. Ojuola, in an effort to justify the innocence of her husband, tells him how the soothsayer is not to be trusted, for other predictions of his seem to be false. This leads to Odewale's discovery of where the murder has taken place and the possibility that he, himself, may be the murderer. Alaka, on the other hand is trying to tell him not to worry because Ogundele and his wife are not his parents, but this leads to the exposure of his past and his sins. It should also be noted that Gbonka's intention to spare the baby's life leads to the whole tragedy.

Gide uses themes like faith and unbelief, humanism and God, blindness by faith and natural blindness, but these are not issues in Rotimi's work. Personal character, ethnicity, and patriotism are the focus in his work, as the author states that his aim is to depict the Nigerian society where tribalism is the greatest cause of socioeconomic set-back. In relation to the original work, Rotimi uses the choral element in Greek drama with miming, dancing, chanting, observing, and participating--which are also continuing tendencies in African dramatic tradition. Gide in his work blames God for Oedipe's fall: "Crime imposé par Dieu, embusqué par Lui sur ma route. Dès avant que je fusse né, le piège était tendu, pour que j'y dusse trébucher. Car, ou ton oracle mentait, ou je ne pouvais pas me sauver. J'étais traqué."[1] Rotimi blames Odewale himself: "No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defense of his tribe against others."[2] Finally, he says: "When the wood-insect gathers sticks, on its own head it carries them."[3]

In conclusion, it can be said that both authors have succeeded in bringing to the layman's understanding, especially in their cultures, Sophocles' Oedipus legend. Rotimi and his works represent the infancy of African Theatre and are to African drama what Gide and his works, which represent the maturity, are to twentieth-century French literature. Each of these two dramatists represents the best in these two stages of development.

NOTES

[1] André Gide, Oedipe (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), 103.

[2] Ola Rotimi, The Gods Are Not to Blame (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 71.

[3] Ibid., 72.

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